

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 9 MARCH 2015 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

#### **Present:**

##### *Members:*

John Pemberton (Chairman)  
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre  
David Harrison (Deputy Chairman – and in the Chair for minute item 53)  
Edward Heron  
John Sanger  
Marian Spain  
Ken Thornber  
Pat Wyeth

##### *Officers:*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Julia Mutlow	Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management and Learning
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Nigel Stone	Finance and Performance Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Heleana Aylett	Human Resources Manager
Jo Murphy	Information and Data Protection Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

##### *Also in attendance:*

Glenda Chambers      Senior Auditor (New Forest District Council)

#### **44      Apologies for absence**

44.1      An apology for absence was received from Maureen Holding.

#### **45      Declarations of Interest**

45.1      John Pemberton, Pat Wyeth and Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre declared a non pecuniary but prejudicial interest in minute item 53, New Forest Centre Agreement as Trustees of the Ninth Centenary Trust which operates the New Forest Centre. They addressed the Committee but did not remain for the debate or vote on the matter.

45.2      Marian Spain declared a non pecuniary and non prejudicial interest in minute item 53, New Forest Centre Agreement as the Trustee of the Ninth Centenary Trust appointed by the National Park Authority.

## 46 Chairman's announcements

- 46.1 The Chairman advised Members that Nigel Stone would like to update Members on the Authority's Procurement Strategy and that it would be discussed under agenda item 13 - Any items that the chairman decides are urgent.

## 47 Minutes

- 47.1 David Stone advised Members that, in line with the resolution at minute item 40.3, the proposed Members' Attendance spreadsheet had now been circulated to Members by email and that the Corporate Services Team were in the process of collating Members' responses in order that the format for publication could be finalised.

### **Resolved, that:**

**the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.**

*Voting: none voting against*

## 48 Public Question Time

- 48.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

## 49 Third Quarter Progress Report on 2014-15 Operational Plan (NFNPA RAPC 251/15)

- 49.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report and reminded Members that it covered the period April to December 2014. One member queried why the 'Conservation of the Natural Environment' indicator targets were still not confirmed and asked when they would be available. Nigel Stone explained that the indicators in question were new targets which had only been introduced this year and that the Authority was working with Natural England and others to establish the base position. He explained that he had recently received draft targets and reassured Members that the full picture would be reported at year end and that once established they would be available for next year's reporting.
- 49.2 Members debated various water course projects that had been undertaken by the Forestry Commission and commented that there was a public perception that the stream restoration projects carried out to date had not always delivered the expected benefits. Members were informed that remedial work was often required; however this did not necessarily indicate that the initial work had been unsuccessful. Steve Avery advised Members that the more significant schemes required planning permission and that some schemes had been considered by the Planning Development Control Committee. It was recommended that a briefing be arranged for Members on this topic.

**Action:** A briefing be organised to update Members on the work being carried out on stream restoration.

- 49.3 One Member commented that the KPI for 'appeals allowed against refusal of planning permission' was below target. Mr Avery explained that the appeals lost had tended to be along subjective lines, and reminded Members that this indicator was reviewed by the Planning Development Control Committee. He confirmed that the percentage had improved since the last reporting period and that he anticipated that the position would improve further by year end.
- 49.4 Members sought clarification on the effect the loss of full GIS support had had on the World War 1 mapping project. Mr Avery explained that the Authority had changed its GIS software providers and was in the process of developing a shared service with the New Forest District Council under a Service Level Agreement. He commented that the WW1 project had been impacted by the changeover period but that the new agreement would be in place from 1 April 2015 and as a result the GIS function would be better resourced than under the previous arrangement.
- 49.5 Members queried why the progress column did not provide a numeric progress compared to the figure stated in the target. For example the New Forest Marke had a target to increase membership numbers by 10%, but at Q3 there was still no indication as to what progress had been made and whether this target would be achieved.

**Action:** Officers to be reminded to include actual figures achieved against performance targets in the Operational Plan.

- 49.6 Members debated how the NPA could access future funding and discussed closer links with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It was suggested that the NPA invite Geoff French, the Chair of the Enterprise M3 LEP, to the New Forest to see first-hand the projects that were being delivered.

**Action:** The Chairman of the Authority to write to Geoff French, the Chair of the Enterprise M3 LEP, and extend an invitation to him to visit the New Forest.

- 49.7 Members then noted the report.

## **50 Internal Audit Charter, Assurance Framework and Audit Plan (NFNPA RAPC 252/15)**

- 50.1 Glenda Chambers, Senior Auditor at NFDC informed the Committee that the report was in three sections; the Internal Audit Charter, the Assurance Framework and the Internal Audit Plan for 2015-16. She confirmed that the Charter and Framework were unchanged from those agreed last year and that the plan detailed the number of days to be spent on each of the audits.
- 50.2 One Member asked whether there was a policy on zero-hours contracts when additional audit resources were required from external contractors. Ms Chambers explained that external contractors were only used if the NFDC team did not possess the requisite skills to carry out a particular audit and that currently she did not foresee a need to use external resources. Answering a point on the wider issue of the use of zero-hours contracts by Authority suppliers, Nigel Stone reminded Members that such

contracts were currently legal but that the NPA could make it clear in its Procurement Policy that it did not encourage the use of them.

**Action:** Nigel Stone to liaise with the Finance and Procurement Officer to ensure that the Procurement Policy incorporates the NPA's position on zero-hours contracts.

50.3 One Member requested more details on what was covered under the IT Controls audit. Ms Chambers advised the Committee that the purpose of the audit was to check the security of data and identify any Data Protection issues. Steve Avery explained that the audit had been included to ensure that adequate IT controls were in place following the loss of the ICT Manager post.

**Resolved, that:**

1. **the Internal Audit Charter,**
2. **the Assurance Framework, and**
3. **the Internal Audit Plan 2015/16 be approved.**

*Voting: none voting against*

## **51 Draft Budget 2015-16 (NFNPA RAPC 253/15)**

51.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report and drew Members' attention to an error in the second recommendation. He explained that, as described in the paper, the final figure should read £0.3 million and not £0.4 million as stated in the recommendation. He reminded Members that the budget had been drafted under the auspices of the Task and Finish Group, which had been set up to look at the future finance implications for the Authority and that at the latest meeting of the group the budget had been presented and received full support.

51.2 Mr Stone highlighted the considerable external funding received by the Authority which was in addition to the Defra grant, as detailed in the table at 3.2. He also drew Members' attention to the income analysis at paragraph 3.4 and the expenditure analysis at paragraph 3.5. Mr Stone reminded the Committee that the Sustainable Communities Fund was under review and that the amount allocated to it in 2015/16 had been significantly reduced. He also explained that, although the ICT expenditure appeared to have been increased, it had actually been reduced by 15%, owing to the outsourcing of the ICT function with resulting savings being reflected in the salaries budget.

51.3 Members debated the level of reserves currently held by the Authority and indicated that where there were plans to spend the reserves that the money should be moved to earmarked reserves. Mr Stone confirmed that once projects started, for example affordable housing schemes, he would be able to transfer the budget into the earmarked reserves.

- 51.4 The resolution, as stated on the paper with the previously noted correction to the second recommendation, was proposed and seconded.

**Resolved, that:**

1. the General Fund Budget for 2015/16 be supported and recommended for approval at the Authority meeting on 26 March 2015;
2. the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve remains at £0.3 million be noted;
3. the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2015/16 be noted;
4. the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7) be noted;
5. the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 be supported and recommended for approval at the Authority meeting on 26 March 2015, and
6. the Medium Term Financial Plan up to 2017/18 in Annex 4 be noted.

*Voting: none voting against*

## **52 Annual Report (NFNPA RAPC 254/15)**

- 52.1 Hilary Makin reminded Members that, when the previous Annual Report was published, Members had requested to have more input into the content of future reports. She explained that the table, contained within the paper, summarised the content of the 2013/14 report and the proposed content for inclusion in 2014/15.

- 52.2 Members suggested areas of the Authority's work which might be considered for inclusion, as listed below:

- Progress on affordable housing, e.g. the Bransgore housing project
- New Forest Marque
- Clear mention of the savings and efficiencies delivered and the shared services which have been agreed
- Highlight engagement with local communities such as the superfast broadband roll out and volunteering opportunities
- The Authority's sustainability initiatives and its environmental footprint analysis
- Education projects and highlighting the grants available to schools to enable them to visit the New Forest

**Resolved, that:**

**the above list be considered for inclusion in the Annual Report.**

*Voting: none voting against*

## **53 New Forest Centre Agreement (NFNPA RAPC 255/15)**

- 53.1 Nigel Matthews explained that the Authority was currently providing £40,000 per year as a contribution to the running costs of the New Forest Centre but that this agreement expired at the end of March 2015. He stated that the proposed new agreement was for a five year period and was to maintain the £40,000 per annum contribution. He reminded Members that two years ago the grant had been reduced from £50,000 to the current amount. He also drew Members' attention to the clauses that would enable the Authority to vary the agreement during the period if necessary.

- 53.2 Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre, Pat Wyeth and John Pemberton all addressed the meeting and voiced their support for the Centre, reiterating that the centre's location and high visitor numbers meant that there was an opportunity to engage with many visitors and that they felt it was good value for money. Members were also reminded that the library contained 22,000 items which were accessible to the Authority. They then left the meeting and took no part in the debate or vote, having previously declared a non-pecuniary but prejudicial interest.
- 53.3 David Harrison assumed the Chair for the remainder of this item. Members voiced concerns that, given the uncertainty of the Authority's future grant allocation, a commitment for five years was too long and that the benefits of the grant to the National Park were not articulated clearly enough. One Member suggested that the Authority could redirect some of the funds to develop an alternative strategy, such as operating its own information desk in the forest campsites.
- 53.4 Alison Barnes cautioned the Committee to consider funding and timescales that were sufficient to enable the Ninth Centenary Trust to forward plan, maintain our positive relationship with the Centre and deliver mutual benefits. An alternative proposal was put forward and seconded, which was to allocate the £40,000 funding for a period of one year and to use that time to review the benefits of the association before extending the agreement any further.

**Resolved, that it be recommended to the Authority that:**

- 1. the proposed agreement be entered into with the Ninth Centenary Trust for one year (2015-2016),**
- 2. £40,000 be allocated to the Ninth Centenary Trust for the year 2015-2016, and**
- 3. a review of the benefits of the association for the Authority be undertaken during 2015/16 to enable decisions to be made about any extension to the agreement beyond March 2016.**

*Voting: (4-0)*

**54 Sabbatical Leave Policy (NFNPA RAPC 256/15)**

- 54.1 Heleana Aylett reminded Members that this matter had been discussed at a previous meeting and she drew their attention to the annexes which provided details of policies which had been adopted by other National Park Authorities and also a list of the existing benefits for Authority staff.
- 54.2 Members debated various aspects of the policy, in particular the qualifying period and the period of leave which might be allowed. Following these discussions an alternative recommendation was proposed and seconded to adopt the policy, with a qualifying period of seven years' service and a sabbatical leave period of up to three months. Members also recommended that the policy be reviewed after two years to establish the level of take up and to evaluate the success of the policy.

**Resolved, that:**

- 1. the sabbatical leave policy, subject to the recommended amendments, i.e. the completion of seven years' service and for a period of up to three months leave, be adopted, and**
- 2. once the policy has been in operation for two years that a review be undertaken.**

*Voting: Resolution 1(5-1, 1 abstention) and Resolution 2 (1 voting against)*

**55 Broadband Scheme in New Forest Update (NFNPA RAPC 257/15)**

55.1 Steve Avery advised Members that the report provided an update on the delivery of the superfast broadband programme. He explained that several cabinets had been successfully installed but that there were some issues still to be resolved where cabinets were being installed on SSSIs.

55.2 Members noted the report.

**56 Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent**

56.1 Nigel Stone advised the Committee that the new Public Contract Regulations 2015 came into force on 26 February 2015 and also that the Government had published a new transparency code in late 2014, both of which would affect the Authority. He stated that Members needed to be aware of the changes and the action the Authority was taking to meet these new regulations. He agreed to circulate more information on both matters in the Members' Bulletin.

**Action:** Nigel Stone to circulate the details regarding the new Public Contract Regulations and Transparency Code in the next Members' Bulletin. *(Details circulated in Members Bulletin 496, 13 March 2015)*

**57 Date of next meeting**

57.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 1 June 2015 at 10.00 hours at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 13.40 hours

Signed .....Date.....  
(Chairman)